

HABAKUKK

INTRODUCTION

Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah have a great deal in common. Each one gives a different facet of the dealings of God with mankind. They show how the government of God is integrated into the government of men. They also show God's dealings with the individual.

Another similarity is the fact that they come from approximately the same time period. In fact, they all could have been contemporaries, and the possibility is that they were. (It is difficult to nail down the specific dates of the prophets -- and of many of the other Old Testament books. The reason, of course, is that the exact dates are not important.) At least we know that all three prophets fit into the period between the reigns of kings Josiah and Jehoiakim, which would also be the time of the prophet Jeremiah. The northern kingdom had already gone into captivity, and the southern kingdom was right on the verge of captivity. After Josiah, every king in the southern kingdom was a bad king. Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah all fit into that period of decline.

Although there are similarities, these books also differ from each other. Nahum dealt only with Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire. Nahum showed that God is just, righteous, and a God of love; yet He was absolutely right in judging that city.

Habakkuk approaches the problem from a little different viewpoint. He is a man with questions. He is disturbed about God's seeming indifference to the iniquity of His own people. Habakkuk asks God, "Why don't You do something?" In our day a great many folk feel as Habakkuk did. They are asking, "Why doesn't God do something? Why doesn't He move into the affairs of men and stop the violence and injustice and suffering?"

God answered the question for Habakkuk by informing him that He was preparing a nation, Babylon, to punish Judah and to take her into captivity -- unless she changed her ways. Well, if you think Habakkuk had a problem before, you can see that he really had a problem then! Habakkuk asked, "Why will You use Babylon -- a nation that is definitely more wicked, more pagan, and more given over to idolatry than Your own people -- to punish Judah?" God reveals to Habakkuk that He was not through with Babylon but would judge her also. This is God's method.

This book is very important in its relationship to the New Testament. It is generally conceded that the three great doctrinal books of the New Testament are Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews, all of which quote from Habakkuk. In fact, [Habakkuk 2:4](#) is the background of their message: "The just shall live by his faith." So this little book looms upon the horizon of Scripture as being important. Don't let the brevity of it deceive you. Importance is not determined by how much you say but by what you say.

The name Habakkuk means "to embrace." Dr. Charles Feinberg (Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, p. 11) described Martin Luther's striking definition of this name:

Habakkuk signifies an embracer, or one who embraces another, takes him into his arms. He embraces his people, and takes them to his arms, i.e., he comforts them and holds them up, as one embraces a weeping child, to quiet it with the assurance that, if God wills, it shall soon be better.

Habakkuk told us nothing of his personal life, even of the era in which he lived. I call him the doubting Thomas of the Old Testament because he had a question mark for a brain. His book is really unusual. It is not a prophecy in the strict sense of the term. It is somewhat like the Book of Jonah in that Habakkuk told of his own experience with God - his questions to God and God's answers. We could say that Habakkuk was born in the objective case, in the pluperfect tense, in the subjunctive mood. We write over him a big question mark until, in the last chapter and especially in the final two or three verses, we can put down an exclamation point. This book is the personal experience of the prophet told in poetry, as Jonah's was told in prose.

Habakkuk was an interesting man, and he has written a lovely book with real literary excellence. The final chapter is actually a song of psalm of praise and adoration to God, a very beautiful piece of literature.

The closing statement in the book, "To the chief singer [musician] on my stringed instruments," reveals that this book is a song. That little note was put there for the director of the orchestra and the choir. The final chapter of the book is a psalm of beauty. In fact, the entire prophecy is a gem. It has been translated into a metric version by A. C. Gaebelein (The Annotated Bible, pp. 214-219). Delitzsch wrote, "His language is classical throughout, full of rare and select turns and words." Moorehouse wrote, "It is distinguished for its magnificent poetry."

This little book opens in gloom and closes in glory. It begins with a question mark and closes with an exclamation point. Habakkuk is a big WHY? Why God permits evil is a question that every thoughtful mind has faced. I think that this book is the answer to that question. Will God straighten out the injustice of the world? This book answers that question. Is God doing anything about the wrongs of the world? This book says that He is. In my opinion it is possible to reduce the doubt of Thomas in the New Testament, of Habakkuk in the Old Testament, and of modern man into the one word. Why? It is the fundamental question of the human race. When we reduce all questions to the lowest common denominator, we come to the basic question: Why?

You can see that the message of Habakkuk is almost the opposite of the message of Nahum. In the Book of Nahum God was moving in judgment, and the question was: How can God be a God of love and judge as He is doing? Here in Habakkuk it is just the opposite: Why doesn't God do something about the evil in the world?

The theme of Habakkuk is faith. He has been called the prophet of faith. The great statement of [Habakkuk 2:4](#), "the just shall live by his faith," has been quoted three times in the New Testament: [Romans 1:17](#); [Galatians 3:11](#); and [Hebrews 10:38](#).

Outline

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- C. Second Problem of the Prophet (greater than first), [Hab. 1:12-17](#)
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II. Perception of the Prophet, [Hab. 2](#)

- A. Practice of the Prophet, [Hab. 2:1](#)
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- B. Patience of the Prophet, [Hab. 2:2-3](#)
He waited for the vision.
- C. Pageant for the Prophet, [Hab. 2:4](#)
The great divide in humanity: One group, which is crooked, is flowing toward destruction; the other group, by faith, is moving toward God. This is inevitable.
- D. Parable to the Prophet, [Hab. 2:5-20](#)
The application is self-evident from the vision. The Chaldeans, in turn, would be destroyed. God was moving among the nations.

III. Pleasure of the Prophet, [Hab. 3](#)

- A. Prayer of the Prophet, [Hab. 3:1-2](#)
The prophet, who thought God was doing nothing about evil, now asks Him to remember to be merciful. Was he afraid that God was doing too much?
- B. Program of God, [Hab. 3:3-17](#)
God rides majestically in His own chariot of salvation ([Hab. 3:8](#)).
- C. Position of the Prophet, [Hab. 3:18-19](#)
He will rejoice ([Hab. 3:18](#)). He has come from pain to pleasure.

Chapter 1

THEME: The perplexity of the prophet

The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see [[Hab. 1:1](#)].

"The burden" means the judgment. Actually, this is not Habakkuk's question, but rather it is the Lord's answer. The answer of God is really the prophecy of the Book of Habakkuk. The Lord's answer is judgment which Habakkuk called, as did the other prophets, "the burden."

First Problem Of The Prophet (1:2-4)

Habakkuk's first problem is this: Why does God permit evil?

O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence and thou wilt not save! [[Hab. 1:2](#)].

"O LORD, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear!" Habakkuk is telling God that He is refusing to answer his prayers. He cries out in a night of despair as he sees violence

among his people. And God is doing nothing and saying nothing. This is the elegy of Habakkuk. As we shall see, the book concludes with a paean of praise and a note of joy.

My friend, if you have a question, my feeling is that you ought to take it to the Lord as Habakkuk did. If you are sincere, you will get an answer from God.

Why dost thou show me iniquity, and cause me to behold
grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there are
that raise up strife and contention.

Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth: for
the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong
judgment proceedeth [[Hab. 1:3-4](#)].

Here is his big question: Why does God permit this evil to continue among His own people -- the iniquity, the injustice, the strife, and contention?

This is both an old question and a new question. It is one which you could ask today. Let's look at it in detail.

Habakkuk, as I suggested in the Introduction, probably wrote sometime after the time of King Josiah, the last good king of the southern kingdom of Judah. After Josiah there was Jehoahaz, a bad one who didn't last more than three months; then Jehoiakim came along and reigned eleven years, and he was a bad one. It was a time of disintegration, deterioration, and degradation in the kingdom. There was a breaking down of the Mosaic Law, and the people were turning away from God. The question was: Why was God permitting this evil?

While I was in a Bible conference in the east several years ago, I talked with two young professors, one from Vanderbilt University and the other from Missouri. They both were Christians and brilliant young men. They told me that the godless professors would use this method to try to destroy young people's faith in the integrity of the Word of God. They would begin like this: "You do not believe that a God of love would permit evil in the world, do you? Do you think a loving God, kind in heart, would permit suffering in the world?"

The enemy, you will recall, used that same method with Eve, as recorded in [Genesis 3](#). He said something like this: "Do you mean to tell me that God does not want you to eat of that tree? Why? That tree has the most delicious fruit of any tree in the garden, and if you eat it, your eyes will be opened, and you will become like God. I can't believe that a good God would forbid your eating of that tree. I just can't understand it!" He was destroying, you see, her confidence in the goodness of God. That is always where the enemy starts.

Habakkuk's question fitted into the local situation of his day. People were getting by with sin, and God was seemingly doing nothing about it. His question was, Why doesn't God judge the wicked? Why does God permit evil men and women to prosper? And isn't that a good question in our day? I'm sure that many of God's people have asked, 'Why doesn't God judge the evil in our nation today? Why does He permit the rich to get richer? And why is it that the average person is having to bear the burden of taxation and inflation? Why doesn't God do something about it?' Is this your question?

That was the psalmist's question in [Psalm 73:2-3](#); "But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped. For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked." As he looked around, he saw that the ones who were prospering were the wicked! It almost robbed him of his faith. Why wasn't God doing something about it?

The people of Judah apparently felt that they were God's little pets and that He would not punish them for their sins. Probably the first time they did something evil they were apprehensive, wondering if God would punish them. When He did nothing, they assumed that He hadn't noticed or didn't care. The writer of Ecclesiastes says in [Eccl 8:11](#); "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."

I can remember when I was a boy and swiped my first watermelon. It was in the summertime, and a storm was coming up. By the time I had pulled a watermelon off the vine and had started to the fence with it, there was a flash of lightning and a clap of thunder the like of which you can only have in southern Oklahoma! I thought the Lord was judging me right there and then for what I had done. But the day came when I discovered that it wasn't judgment from God and I could do that sort of thing without fear.

Human nature does not change. The sins which were committed undercover in the backyard are now done openly in the front yard. Does that change the fact that sin is wrong in the sight of God and that He is going to judge every sin? No, God has not changed His standards or His procedures. Even though His execution against an evil work is not performed speedily, His judgment is sure to come eventually.

In our day very few people believe in the judgment of God. They feel like Habakkuk did when he saw his nation getting worse and worse until sin was flagrant and God was doing nothing about it. Don't you feel that way about conditions as they are? Is God doing anything about it today? It doesn't look as if He is. He even let a group of theologians up in New England come up with the idea a few years ago that God was dead. What they actually meant was that there is no God and there has never been a God. What made them arrive at such a conclusion? It is because they don't see Him interfering in the affairs of men today. But isn't He interfering? Isn't God overruling in the affairs of mankind today? He permitted us to go through a period of affluence, and folk became careless -- even God's people became careless. Now we are in such a state that we wonder how much longer we are going to survive as a nation.

Habakkuk was a man with a very tender heart, and he hated to see lawlessness abounding and going unpunished. He hated to see the innocent people being threatened and exploited and destroyed. He was asking, "God, why aren't you doing something about it?"

Well, God had an answer for him, and He has an answer for you if this is your question.

God's Answer (1:5-11)

Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder
marvellously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not
believe, though it be told you [[Hab. 1:5](#)].

"Behold ye among the heathen," or better, "Behold ye among the nations." God is challenging Habakkuk to open his eyes and look about him, to get a world view of what He is doing. One great crisis after another has taken place. The great Assyrian Empire in the north has been conquered, and Nineveh, its capital, has been destroyed. On the banks of the Euphrates River, a kingdom is arising which already has won a victory over Egypt at Carchemish. Nebuchadnezzar is the victor, and he is bringing Babylon to the fore as a world power. God is saying to Habakkuk, "Behold ye among the nations -- you think I'm not doing anything? I am not sitting on the fifty-yard line watching this little world. I am very much involved." He is not involved to the extent that He is subject to it and has to make certain plays because they are forced upon Him. God is moving in a sovereign way in the universe. He is doing something about sin -- "Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvelously."

"For I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you." God is saying, "It is going to be difficult for you to believe it. Instead of doing nothing, I am doing a great deal." In fact, Habakkuk is going to ask God to slow down when he finds out what God is doing.

"For I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you" is quoted by Paul in the great sermon he gave in Antioch of Pisidia. (I have always felt that this is one of the greatest sermons Paul preached, and yet it is receiving very little attention in our day.) It is recorded in [Acts 13](#). Now notice these words: "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man [the Lord Jesus Christ] is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you" ([Acts 13:38-41](#)). As you can see, Paul is quoting from [Habakkuk 1:5](#). It is an amazing application of this verse. Paul is saying that God has provided a salvation, and He didn't do it (as Paul said elsewhere) in a corner. At the time of the Crucifixion, Jews from all over the world were in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. They carried the word everywhere that Jesus of Nazareth had died on a cross, and it was rumored that He was raised from the dead. Also, Jews from all over the world were back in Jerusalem for the celebration of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came upon the little group of believers. Multitudes were saved at that time and in succeeding days. When that news went out, the Roman world ignored it at first. Paul is telling them that God has worked a work in their days, "a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you."

Today the world asks, "Why doesn't God do something about sin?" My friend, God has done something about it! Over nineteen hundred years ago He gave His Son to die. He intruded into the affairs of the world. And He says that He is going to intrude again in the affairs of the world -- yet today the world goes merrily along picking daisies and having a good time in sin. But God is moving. It is marvelous how Paul used [Habakkuk 1:5](#).

And in Habakkuk's day God was moving. In spite of the lawlessness, the war, and the sin in all the nations, God was overruling and moving in judgment.

Now God is specific in what He was doing --

For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation,
which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the
dwellingplaces that are not theirs [[Hab. 1:6](#)].

God is saying to Habakkuk, 'Look around you. Down there on the banks of the Euphrates River, a nation is rising which will become the first great world power.' (We can check with Daniel on that because Babylon is the head of gold, and it is the lion of Daniel's visions.) Babylon was number one on the parade of the great nations of the world.

"To possess the dwellingplaces that are not theirs." God is telling Habakkuk that the Babylonians are going to take the land of Judah away from them. It was a shock to Habakkuk to hear this.

A "bitter and hasty nation" is a good description of the Babylonian Empire. They were bitter, hateful, and hotheaded, marching for world conquest. They actually took the city of Jerusalem three times, and the third time they burned it to the ground. The Babylonians were a law unto themselves. They considered themselves the superior race, the dominant race, and did not recognize anyone as being equal to them.

They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity
shall proceed of themselves [[Hab. 1:7](#)].

"Their dignity shall proceed of themselves" -- that is, they rely upon themselves. They have great self-confidence and are great boasters. These qualities are evident in Nebuchadnezzar, the founder of this great empire. In the Book of Daniel we find that Nebuchadnezzar suffered from a form of insanity, egomania, called hysteria by modern psychiatry. It was sort of a manic-depressive psychosis. The time came when he didn't even know who he was. In fact, he went out and ate grass like an animal.

Their horses also are swifter than the leopards, and are more fierce
than the evening wolves: and their horsemen shall spread
themselves, and their horsemen shall come from far; they shall fly
as the eagle that hasteth to eat [[Hab. 1:8](#)].

What a picture this is! The Babylonians used the cavalry as probably no other nation has used it. The Egyptians used chariots, and the Assyrians had the latest model in chariots. Now the Babylonians have a different method, the cavalry.

"More fierce than the evening wolves." I remember the hungry wolves in west Texas when I was a boy. After the snow had fallen, my dad warned us to be careful when we went outside. If there were a pack of wolves, it would be necessary to shoot one of them. Then when the blood began to flow, the pack would turn on the wounded wolf and devour him so that we could escape.

"They shall fly as the eagle that hasteth to eat." The Babylonian army would come like hungry animals and ferocious birds and seize upon their prey. That was the story of the Chaldeans, the Babylonians.

They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand [[Hab. 1:9](#)].

"They shall come all for violence." God's people had been engaging in violence, but they hadn't seen anything yet. Wait until the Babylonians get there. God is going to give them a good dose of violence! You see, chickens do come home to roost -- ". . . whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" ([Gal. 6:7](#)).

"Their faces shall sup up as the east wind" has also been translated as "the set of their faces is forward." In both translations the thought seems to be that the enemy will be formidable and irresistible in its advance.

"And they shall gather the captivity as the sand." Nebuchadnezzar led his forces against Jerusalem three times. At the final attack, he burned the city and also the temple and took the survivors into captivity. The Babylonians had only one purpose in view, which was to capture as many nations and as many peoples as possible and make slaves of them. This is what happened to the southern kingdom of Judah.

And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them: they shall deride every strong hold; for they shall heap dust, and take it [[Hab. 1:10](#)].

"And they shall scoff at the kings, and the princes shall be a scorn unto them." They were confident in their own strength and in the power of their heathen gods. As the Assyrians before them, they were arrogant as they marched through the earth.

"They shall deride every strong hold; for they shall heap dust, and take it." They had only to cast up bulwarks to capture walled cities; and, when the cities surrendered, they took the inhabitants into captivity.

Then shall his mind change, and he shall pass over, and offend, imputing this his power unto his god [[Hab. 1:11](#)].

This is exactly what Nebuchadnezzar did. In [Daniel 4:30](#) we read the words of this man: "The king spake, and said, Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honor of my majesty?" He was lifted up with pride. He was an egomaniac. He trusted completely in himself with no trust in God. And we have a few of those around today -- trusting in self rather than in God. In my own nation there is a lack of humility. And, as in Nebuchadnezzar, it is a form of insanity. Each political party -- not one, but all of them -- boasts about what it can do or has done. They point the finger of guilt at the other party and at those holding office. Well, I agree they should repent, but my feeling is that everyone who is at the other end of the pointing fingers should also repent. Our big problem in America is that we depend upon our own strength, our own power, and our own ability. I turn off certain television programs because I am tired of listening to individuals boasting of their accomplishments, which are not very much. It reminds me of that scriptural suggestion of a mountain travailing. What did it bring forth? Another mountain? No, it brought forth a mouse! Although the boasting of great men today sounds like a mountain, what they have accomplished is about as big as a mouse.

In these verses God is saying to Habakkuk, "You think I am doing nothing about the sin of My people, but I am preparing a nation down yonder on the banks of the Euphrates River, and if My people do not repent, I'm going to turn the Babylonians loose." My friend, they came, and the record indicates that their destruction of Jerusalem was fierce and terrible. Some of the things they did when they took the people of Judah captive were almost unspeakable.

Second Problem Of The Prophet (1:12-17)

Now when God says that He is going to use the Babylonians to judge His people, this raises another question in Habakkuk's mind. If you think he had a question before, he really has a question now.

Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One?
We shall not die. O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment;
and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction
[[Hab. 1:12](#)].

This was Habakkuk's problem: Since the Babylonians were even more wicked than the people of Judah, why would God choose a more wicked nation to punish a nation which was comparatively less wicked? This would not be the first time God had used such a method. In [Isaiah 10:5](#) the Assyrian is called the rod of God's anger. In other words, God used Assyria like a whip in order to chastise the northern kingdom. After God had used Assyria for the chastisement of Israel, He judged Assyria for her own sins.

We find the same thing repeated here. God is going to use a wicked nation, Babylon, to chastise His people. When He is through with that chastisement, He will judge Babylon. God did just that. He moves in the affairs of men.

But the problem remains: How can a holy God use a sinful nation to accomplish His purposes?

This may be a new thought for you. You probably have heard it said -- even from some pulpits -- that God would never let Russia overcome the United States because we are the fair-haired boys, the good guys, the fine people. We are the ones who send missionaries to godless nations. God would never use Russia to chastise us. My friend, if you believe the Bible, you will see that God's method is to use a sinful nation to judge a people who are less sinful. If we could see what God is doing today behind the scenes, I am sure it would terrify us. I believe He is actually moving against our nation. Why? Because at one time our nation had a knowledge of God, superficial though it may have been. The Bible was once held in reverence. Very few people knew much about it, but it was respected. In our day the Bible is ignored and absolutely rejected by the nation. They may take an oath by placing their hand upon it, but they neither know nor care to know what is between its covers. Will God allow our nation to continue in its godlessness and in its flagrant sins? I don't think so. Will God use a godless nation to chastise us? Well, that was Habakkuk's question. Why would God, who is a holy God, use a pagan, heathen people to chastise His people?

Listen to Habakkuk's eloquent complaint. "Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One?" God has come out of eternity; He is the eternal God. "O LORD

my God, mine Holy One" -- Habakkuk says, in effect, "You are a Holy God. How can you use a nation like Babylon? Word has come to us that there is a great nation rising down there on the banks of the Euphrates River, but I never dreamed that You would use them against us! They have been friendly to us." When King Hezekiah was sick, they sent ambassadors to him, and he gave them the red-carpet treatment, showing them all the treasures of the kingdom. Of course, the ambassadors made note of that because they would be coming back one day to get that gold. But Habakkuk didn't realize all that. He never dreamed that God would use Babylon to chastise Judah. He didn't understand why a holy God would use such a method.

Then he says, "We shall not die." He was right about that. This goes back to the promises of God to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. God made promises to Moses and to Joshua and to David. He gave promises to the prophets who had appeared on the scene before Habakkuk. God had said that He would never let the nation perish. "We shall not die."

That is a good statement, by the way, to drop down upon our millennial friends who believe that God is through with the nation Israel. God is not through with them; God has an eternal purpose with them, just as He has with the church which He is calling out of this world. And, thank God, the child of God today can say, "We shall not die." The Lord Jesus Christ came to this earth to die -- He said He did -- to die in your stead and in my stead. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life," and He came back from the dead. He ". . . was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification" ([Rom. 4:25](#)). The Lord Jesus said to the two weeping sisters of Lazarus, ". . . I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead [think of that!], yet shall he live." When Habakkuk said, "We shall not die," he was right; they wouldn't. "And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" ([John 11:25-26](#), italics mine). This is the message of the gospel. It is something for you and me to believe. Of course, someday you are going to die physically, but are you dead now spiritually? If you are, you will be dead in trespasses and sins for the rest of eternity, and that means eternal separation from God. God is a holy God, and He is not going to take sin to heaven. But He has promised that if we will trust His Son, He will give us eternal life. God says, "If you will believe that you are a sinner, that you don't deserve salvation and can't work for it, then I offer it to you as a gift. And by My grace you will be saved. You will receive eternal life. He that hath the Son hath life." My friend, do you have the Son today? If you do, you have life, eternal life, and you will not die.

When Habakkuk said to God, "We shall not die," he was on the right track, but he just couldn't understand (as many of us can't understand) some of the performance of God in this world. God had told Habakkuk earlier that he needed to get a perspective of it. You and I have a tremendous advantage in our day because we have the perspective of history. We can look back to Habakkuk's day and even beyond to the very beginning of the human family. We have a very good perspective of God's dealing with the nations of this world and of God's dealing with the nation Israel. Also, God is dealing today with His church that is in the world.

God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform. He has told us that His ways are not our ways, that His thoughts are not our thoughts. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher

than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" ([Isa. 55:8-9](#)).

My friend, do not be disturbed if you are not thinking as God thinks. You are not God. Unfortunately, many folk try to take His place. They are trying to work for their salvation, thinking that their character and their good works will merit them salvation. They expect God to pat them on the head someday and say, "You were certainly a nice, sweet little boy down there." Yet, actually, they were corrupt sinners, alienated from the life of God, with no capacity for God whatsoever. If you come to the Father, you will come His way, or you are not going to get there. We need to recognize this, my friend. We are a nation of proud people who need to be deflated as a pin deflates a balloon. Instead of blaming everyone else for the problems in our nation, or the problems in our church, or the problems in our home, we should fall on our knees before God and confess our own sins -- "not my brother, nor my sister, but it's me, Oh, Lord, standin' in the need of prayer."

This was the condition of the nation of Judah in the days of Habakkuk. He said to God, "We shall not die."

"O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment." Here is Habakkuk pointing his finger at Babylon. "They are the bad guys, and we are the good guys." It is amazing how quickly we can change our point of view. For years I went out to Flagstaff, Arizona, to the Southwest Bible and Missionary Conference. I always enjoyed being out there with the opportunity it offered to have fellowship with the Indians. It was there I learned a good example of man's way of looking at things. One of the young Indian pastors said to me, "You know, Dr. McGee, in the old days when the Indians would raid a village and kill some of the whites, it was called a massacre. But when the whites raided an Indian village and destroyed all the Indians, it was called a victory." It is interesting how we always class ourselves with the good guys.

"O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction." In other words, Habakkuk is saying, "Lord, it really isn't us who are bad after all. They are the mean fellows. They are the ones You should judge and correct." Has he forgotten that he went to the Lord and asked the Lord why He wasn't doing something about the evil among His own people? Habakkuk had pointed out that the people were flaunting the law and were ignoring God, paying no attention to God's commands. Habakkuk had accused God of not doing anything about the situation. Has he forgotten that?

Now here is Habakkuk's argument --

Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he? [[Hab. 1:13](#)].

"Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity." That is a true statement. A holy God cannot look upon evil and iniquity. That is the reason no one can go to heaven with his sin on him. That is why we must all have the forgiveness for our sins. We all need the cleansing power of the blood of the Lamb. We must be given a new nature. We must be born again. Even Nicodemus, a very religious man, needed to be born

again and to receive a new nature. Religion will not wash away sin. It is the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ who died and rose again that will wash away sin. God cannot look on iniquity, and He never will look on iniquity. That is why there is no entrance into heaven for you until your sin has been dealt with.

You see, when God forgives you, it is because the penalty for your sin has been paid for by His Son. God is not a sentimental old gentleman who doesn't have the heart to judge little man down here on this earth. God is a holy God who will not look upon iniquity. Your sin will have to be confessed and forgiven before you can be accepted by Him.

"Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously." Habakkuk says, "You can't trust those Babylonians. They are sinners and a bunch of crooks!" He was right. They were. But God was going to use them to accomplish his purpose.

This is frightening to me. Don't ever get the idea that God cannot use a godless nation to chasten another nation. I speak now from the point of view of a white man and an American. For years the white man in all the great nations of Europe ruled the world through those great, proud nations. Then America became one of the leading nations of the world. God humiliated us in the war with Vietnam. He is humiliating us in our dealings with the Middle East. All they need to do is turn off the supply of oil, and suddenly we take a nosedive. God deals with the nations of the world in interesting ways. I watch what has been happening in the world with a great deal of interest. I have come to the conclusion that God is still moving among the nations of the world today. You and I may be frightened as we contemplate what lies ahead, but God is not frightened. He is still in charge. Nothing is out of His control. He is still running this universe.

"Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?" Habakkuk said the wrong thing here. It is not "the man that is more righteous than he" because none are righteous. He should have said, "the man who is a greater sinner than he." But God didn't say that. He was going to punish on that basis. God is going to use the Babylonians to punish His people.

This brings us to one of the most eloquent sections of the Word of God.

And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things,
that have no ruler over them?

They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their
net, and gather them in their drag: therefore they rejoice and are
glad.

Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their
drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat
plenteous [[Hab. 1:14-16](#)].

"And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them" refers to the callousness with which the Babylonians handled their enemies, treating them as fish of the sea or as creeping things in the soil which have no defense.

The angle and the net and the drag represent the armies and the weapons used by the Babylonians to carry on their military conquests.

God also uses the catching of fish as a figure of speech, but He catches fish to save them, not to destroy them. You remember that the Lord Jesus said to some of His own disciples who were fishermen, "You have been catching fish and that's fine, but I am going to give you a job of catching men" (see [Matt. 4:19](#)). My friend, to me the greatest business in the world is to be a fisherman, and that is all I claim to be. We are to fish for men in our day.

"Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag." The Babylonians were pagans, of course, and gave no credit to the true and living God for their successes.

There are fishermen here in Southern California who think that they get a good catch because their priest has blessed the fishing fleet. That has nothing in the world to do with it, my friend. The reason that you can get plenty to eat is that God is good, and that is the only reason. God is good, and He is the one who provides.

Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations? [[Hab. 1:17](#)].

Habakkuk is asking God, "Are You going to permit them to go on into the future, destroying people after people?" God's answer is, "No, I'm going to send Judah into captivity in Babylon as a chastisement, a judgment for her sins, but then I will judge Babylon." My friend, God did exactly that, and in our day Babylon lies under the dust and rubble of the ages. It is a silent but eloquent testimony that God does judge evil.

Now let's translate this interrogation of Habakkuk into the times in which we live. Why does God permit evil? Well, He permits it because He is long-suffering. He is not willing that any should perish, and He has provided a cross, a crucified Savior, so that no one needs to perish. This He did at the first coming of Christ.

Habakkuk's second question is, "Why does not God judge the wicked?" God will answer that at the second coming of Christ, because at that time He will judge sin. All we need is a perspective to see the answers to these two questions. Christ came the first time to wear a crown of thorns and to die upon a cross. The next time He comes, He will wear a crown of glory and will hold the scepter that will rule the earth.

To make a personal application of this, we ask the question, "Why does God permit this trial to happen to me?" I do not know what the answer is for you, but God has an answer.

Several years ago I stayed in a motel in Siloam Springs, Arkansas, at a location where I could throw a rock into the state of Oklahoma. My dad is buried over there. When I was a boy of fourteen, I stood by his grave and wept. He had been killed in an accident at a cotton gin. After the funeral service was over and everyone had gone, I rode back on my bicycle to his grave. I wept and cried, "Why, oh God, did You take him?" Time has gone by, and today I have an answer for that. I know now that it was God's method of dealing with a boy who would never have entered the ministry otherwise.

Actually, what right do we have to question our Maker? What right does little man have to look into the face of heaven and demand, "Why do you do this?" Well, to begin with, it is none of our business. It is God's business. This is His universe, and He is running it to please Himself. We are to trust Him.

I can remember when I was a little boy in Oklahoma, we lived in an area that had many tornadoes. In the night my dad would pick me up, and I would begin to cry and ask, "Where are we going?" He would take me down to the storm cellar where it was dark and damp and not very comfortable. He would put me on a pallet, and in the morning I would awaken and be safe and secure. When I was a crying little boy, my dad didn't explain tornadoes to me. He simply protected me from them. All I knew was that I trusted my dad. After my dad died, I learned more and more to trust my Heavenly Father. There are times He has done things to me that He hasn't explained. He took my first child, and I really had a question about that. Do you want to know something? I still have a question mark about it. But I do know this: He has the answer. Someday He will tell me the answer. In the meantime, I'll trust Him.

Chapter 2

THEME: The perception of the prophet

In chapter 1 we saw the perplexity of the prophet. Now the prophet has learned that God has answers for his questions. He answered his first question, which raised a bigger question, but God has an answer for that also.

My friend, if you have a question, don't smother it in pious phraseology. I often hear people say, "Oh, I'm trusting the Lord, " when they are not trusting Him; they are questioning Him every step of the way. There is no sin in questioning the Lord. Just go to Him and tell Him that you don't understand. This is what Habakkuk did.

Practice Of The Prophet (2:1)

I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved [[Hab. 2:1](#)].

Habakkuk says that he is going to the watchtower to wait. (When he says, "watchtower," he doesn't mean that he is going to read a magazine!) Prophets are compared to watchmen in several of the books of prophecy. For instance, in Ezekiel it was, "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me" ([Ezek. 3:17](#)). The prophets were watchmen who were to prophesy to the nation, and God would hold them responsible for giving out His warning. In a walled city the watchman was the one who watched for enemies during the night; if he was faithful, the city was safe. But if he should betray the city or fail to sound the alarm when an enemy approached, the city was in deep trouble. So Habakkuk, God's prophet, says that he is going to the watchtower to wait for a message from God.

"I . . . will watch to see what he will say unto me." Habakkuk is saying, "I'm going to wait patiently, because I know that God has an answer. I don't know what it will be, but I know He has an answer and He will give that answer in due time."

"And what I shall answer when I am reproved." The word reprove here is not the best translation of the original word: Habakkuk did not expect God to rebuke him or, to use the common colloquialism, "bawl him out" because he was questioning God's ways. Habakkuk felt that God would give him the right answer so he would understand God's ways. And he was willing to wait for it.

God often delays. He moves slowly in all that He does. God intends to give Habakkuk an answer, but it will come in His own time. We are the ones who are in a hurry; God is not. For example, sometimes we hear Christians speak of the "soon coming of Christ." Can you show me in the Bible where that is found? I have never found it. Jesus said, "Behold, I come quickly . . ." ([Rev. 22:7](#), italics mine). He didn't say He was coming soon. It has now been over nineteen hundred years since He spoke those words, and that could hardly be called soon. He said He would return quickly, because the things that are mentioned in Revelation, which will happen just before He returns to earth, are going to happen quickly. The thing which will introduce the last seven years before Christ comes to establish His Kingdom will be the rapture of the church. When the church leaves the earth, events will move quickly -- like a trip-hammer, one blow right after another. Christ will come quickly. He will come right on schedule. We are not to look for the soon coming of Christ but the imminent coming of Christ.

Neither will Christ "delay" His coming, as I hear some pious brothers say. The Lord is coming on His schedule -- nor mine nor yours. He will not delay. But we must remember that the Lord is long-suffering. He is patient. He is not willing that any should perish. And in Habakkuk's day there was a company of people down yonder in Babylon whom God was going to save. That seventy-year captivity of the children of Israel was going to be a glorious time for God because He was going to reach even the heart of Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Babylonians!

Habakkuk says, "I'm going to retire now to my watchtower. I don't have the answer, but I'm going to wait for an answer from God." And, my friend, you and I are to walk by faith and not by sight. In [2Corinthians 5](#) the apostle Paul speaks of the time when our bodies will be put into the grave. The day will come when Christ will call us and raise up our bodies from the grave. In the meantime, when we are absent from the body, we are present with the Lord. When we leave these bodies, we are going to be at home with the Lord. There is an interval of time between the burial of our bodies and the resurrection of our bodies. The Lord moves slowly as judged by the way we look at things. That is why Paul interposes here, "For we walk by faith, not by sight:" ([2Cor. 5:7](#)). Do you have questions which have not been answered? I do. But I have learned, as I did as a little boy when my dad picked me up and carried me to the storm cellar, that my Heavenly Father also has reasons for the things He does in my life. Although I don't always understand them now, I know that He has the answer, and someday He will give it to me. We need to trust Him.

Patience Of The Prophet (2:2-3)

And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it [[Hab. 2:2](#)]

God is saying, "Write it so that those folk in the twentieth century -- especially that fellow, McGee, who will have some questions [and I think He had you in mind also] -- will have an answer from Me during the days when they will be walking by faith."

"That he may run that readeth it." We sometimes get that turned around and make it say, "That he who runs may read it." That is not what God is saying. He says that we need to have a road map with us. We need to know where we are going. We need to know a great deal about the way so that, after we have read it, we may run. That is, the one reading it was to run to tell it forth; he was to be the messenger of God's Word.

My friend, there are many folk today who are trying to preach and trying to teach God's Word without adequate preparation. They need to do more reading before they start running. I remember when I wanted to enter into the ministry, I thought I would skip part of my college training and bypass seminary and go immediately to a Bible school and then start preaching. I thank God for a marvelous, wonderful pastor who told me to get all the training I could get. Learn to read before you start running. Before you begin to witness, be able to give a reason for the hope that is in you.

For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry [[Hab. 2:3](#)].

"For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak." There is no better way to explain this than to quote a note on this verse in The New Scofield Reference Bible (p. 954):

To the watching prophet comes the response of the vision ([Hab. 2:2-20](#)). Three elements are to be distinguished: (1) The moral judgment of the LORD upon the evil practiced by Israel ([Hab. 2:5-13](#), [15-19](#)). (2) The future purpose of God that "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" ([Hab. 2:14](#)). That this revelation awaits the return of the Lord in glory is shown (a) by the parallel passage in [Isa. 11:9-12](#); and (b) by the quotation of [v. 3](#) in [Heb. 10:37-38](#), where the "it" of the vision becomes "he" and refers to the return of the Lord. It is then, after the vision is fulfilled, that "the knowledge of the glory," etc. shall fill the earth. But (3) meantime, "the just shall live by his faith." This great evangelical word is applied to Jews and Gentiles in [Rom. 1:17](#); to the Gentiles in [Gal. 3:11-14](#); and to the Hebrews especially in [Heb. 10:38](#). This opening of life to faith alone, makes possible not only the salvation of the Gentiles, but also makes possible a believing remnant in Israel while the nation, as such, is in blindness and unbelief (see [Rom. 11:1](#) and [Rom 11:5](#), notes), with neither priesthood nor temple, and consequently unable to keep the ordinances of the law. Such is the LORD! In disciplinary government His ancient Israel is cast out of the land and judicially blinded ([2Cor. 3:12-15](#)), but in covenanted mercy the individual Jew may resort to the simple faith of Abraham ([Gen. 15:6](#); [Rom. 4:1-5](#)) and be saved. This, however, does not set aside the Palestinian and Davidic Covenants (see [Dt. 30:3](#) and [2Sam. 7:16](#), notes), for "the earth shall be filled," etc. ([v. 14](#)), and the LORD will again be in His Temple ([v. 20](#)). Cp. [Rom. 11:25-27](#).

My friend, you can depend on the fact that someday God will give us the answers to all of our questions. That is going to be a great day! I am not interested in heaven's golden

streets, but I am very interested in learning the answers to a great many questions that puzzle mankind in our day. In the meantime, we are to walk by faith.

Pageant For The Prophet (2:4)

This brings us to one of the most important verses in the Scriptures. It is the key to the little Book of Habakkuk. And, actually, it gives the key to the three great doctrinal epistles in the New Testament that quote this verse: [Romans 1:17](#); [Galatians 3:11](#); and [Hebrews 10:38](#).

Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith [[Hab. 2:4](#)].

"The just shall live by his faith." There have been many ways of attempting to sidestep the tremendous impact of this verse. Some have attempted to interpret "faith" as faithfulness or right dealing -- the just shall live by his faithfulness. However, this verse gives us the two ways which are opened up to mankind.

Notice that the verse mentions two groups of individuals which are in the world: (1) the lifted-up or puffed-up souls; and (2) the just man who is living by his faith. In other words, you could call them the lost and the saved, those who have trusted God and those who have not believed God. Or you can call them the saints and the ain'ts -- that makes a sharp division also.

You remember that [verse 1](#) told us that Habakkuk has gone to his watchtower to wait for the answer of God. It will be God's great message which will explain His dealings with individuals and with nations. So here in [verse 4](#) we have a great principle that God has laid down. Actually, it is an axiom of the Bible.

You will remember that when you studied geometry, you accepted certain axioms which were self-evident and you didn't have to prove. For example, a straight line is the shortest distance between two points. And there are certain statements in the Scriptures which are great axioms. This is one of them: "Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him."

"His soul which is lifted up is not upright in him" describes a group of people who are proud. Either they are attempting to work out their own salvation, or they are just living for today with the philosophy of "eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die." They have no real goal in life. "His soul . . . is not upright in him." He is wrong. He is going down the wrong pathway. "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" ([Prov. 14:12](#)). You know, I am sure, many folk in this group of humanity. They have a lifted-up or puffed-up soul. They are lifted up with pride. As they meander along their way, picking daisies as they go, they move as on a slow-moving river and will finally arrive at the sea of destruction. That is their end. The Scriptures seldom enlarge upon the fate of the lost, but our Lord Jesus followed them through when He told of the rich man and Lazarus (see [Luke 16](#)). When Lazarus died, he was carried to paradise; when the rich man died, he went to hades. He went, as it was said of Judas, to his own place. If you go through life like this, your end will be the same.

"The just shall live by his faith" describes the second group of the human family. They are flowing down the river of life toward the city of God and toward full knowledge -- ". . . then shall I know even as also I am known" ([1Cor. 13:12](#), italics mine). Between the moment of salvation and the then, the saved ones will walk by faith. We may not have the answers to our questions now, but God will give them to us when we arrive in His presence.

Now because [Habakkuk 2:4](#) is quoted in the New Testament and is actually the key to the Epistles of Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews, let's look at these quotations more carefully.

In the Epistle to the Romans, the emphasis is upon justification by faith for salvation. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith" ([Rom. 1:16-17](#), italics mine). The point here is that "the just," the one who has been justified by faith, shall also live by faith. And that is the great message of the Epistle to the Romans.

In the Epistle to the Galatians, the quotation is this: "But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith" ([Gal. 3:11](#), italics mine). The emphasis is a little different here, for we find in [Galatians 2:20](#), "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." While in Romans the emphasis was on justification by faith for salvation, in Galatians the emphasis is not only on faith that saves, but on a faith by which you live throughout life.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, the quotation from [Habakkuk 2:4](#) is this: "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him" ([Heb. 10:38](#)). Here the emphasis is upon the word live -- "the just shall live by faith." And in the following chapter, we read of men and women who lived by faith -- the emphasis is upon living.

When Habakkuk looked into the future, he asked, 'Why, God?' Now from our vantage point, we can look back into history and see the answer to Habakkuk's question. God sent His own people into captivity because it served the purpose of chastisement for their sins. And now we see His greater purpose: it enabled Him to bring the Savior into the world -- in the fullness of time.

Again I want to draw your attention to Paul's great sermon at Antioch of Pisidia: "But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption. Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you" ([Acts 13:37-41](#)). Therefore, Paul shuts them in to only one way to God -- faith. The message is: ". . . Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" ([1Cor. 15:3-4](#)).

And what are we to do? We are to accept Him as our Savior. We are to trust Him and walk by faith -- not by law. I am disturbed when I see so many folk today who are attempting to put believers back under the Ten Commandments or under some little legal system that they have worked out, such as rules and regulations for the family -- for the husband and for the wife and for the child. Oh, my friend, if you have been saved by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, love Him. Loving Him will work out your problems. Loving Him will enable you to walk in the Spirit; and walking in the Spirit, you will be filled with the Spirit, and you will have joy in your heart. You will be a better husband or a better wife or a better child. You will be a better employee or a better employer. Wherever you are, you will be a better person if you walk by faith, and one of these days you will walk right into His presence and be with Him throughout eternity.

Habakkuk was a man of faith. He said, "I'll go to my watchtower and wait for God's answer. I am trusting the One who does have the answer." You see, ". . . without faith it is impossible to please him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" ([Heb. 11:6](#)). And the "just shall live by his faith." My friend, today God is asking you to come to Him, and the only way you can come to Him is by faith. The man of faith receives life by faith, he walks by faith, and he moves into eternity by faith -- not by his own ability but on the strength and the ability of Another.

Let me repeat that [Habakkuk 2:4](#) gives the two ways which are opened up to mankind. Our Lord Jesus put it like this: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" ([Matt. 7:13-14](#)).

The broad way is actually like a funnel. It is very wide at the place where you enter, but it narrows down so that the follower ends up in only one place -- destruction. That is the story of the unbelieving sinner. It is like going down a canyon. I have experienced this when I have been hunting out here in the West. You can start out in the desert in a very wide, open spot. Soon you enter into a canyon; and, as you go deeper and deeper into the canyon, the floor of the canyon gets narrower and narrower. That is the picture here. The entrance is wide, but the end narrows down to destruction.

The straight gate, or the narrow gate, is also an entrance into a funnel. In this case, the gate or entrance is very narrow. Jesus Christ said, ". . . I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" ([John 14:6](#)). That entrance is narrowed down to one person. He is the way. He doesn't just show us the way; He is the way. "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" ([1John 5:12](#)). You either have Christ, or you don't have Him. You either trust Him, or you don't trust Him. Your salvation has nothing in the world to do with going through a ceremony or making pledges or going forward in a meeting or in joining a church. Your salvation is dependent upon your relationship with Jesus Christ. That is the reason it is a narrow gate. God has given to the world just this one way. The issue is what you will do with Jesus Christ who died on the Cross and rose again. That is why Jesus said, ". . . strait is the

gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" ([Matt. 7:14](#)).

This gate is also like a funnel. You enter in at the narrow gate -- Christ is the way. But as you enter, it doesn't narrow down even more. No, it widens out. Jesus said, ". . . I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" ([John 10:10](#)). Oh, the freedom and liberty He gives to those who are His own!

Let me give an example. Alcohol addiction and drug addition can look like a broad road of liberty, but they end in the narrow canyon of destruction. My dad used to say, "I can drink, or I can let it alone." He died when I was fourteen. He was a heavy drinker, but he was never an alcoholic. When I was a boy, I would talk to him about his heavy drinking and ask why he didn't give it up. He would say, "Son, I can give it up any time I want to." Do you know what his problem was? He didn't want to. Had he lived longer, I am confident the day would have come when he would have found himself in a very narrow canyon with only one alternative, and that would be to take another drink.

Now the Christian who went in the narrow gate by trusting Christ as his Savior never gets to the place where it narrows down. He really is living. If you really want to live, come to Christ.

Parable To The Prophet (2:5-20)

Now how about the other crowd -- those whose soul "is not upright in him"? The following "woes" are directed to them and refer primarily to the plundering Babylonians who would conquer Judah. These "woes" are just about as systematic and orderly as anything you will find in Scripture. They are presented in five stanzas of three verses each.

Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, he is a proud man,
neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell, and is
as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all
nations, and heapeth unto him all people [[Hab. 2:5](#)].

"Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine." He is talking about the Babylonians. At that moment Babylon was not the great nation that it became later at the time of Daniel.

The first charge is that they transgressed by wine and were proud. "Neither keepeth at home" -- they longed to go forth and conquer. "But gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people." They were inflamed with an ambition for conquest. They were never satisfied but kept attacking nation after nation, gathering spoil and captives. Babylon became the first great world power. They wanted to rule the world. That has been the ambition of a great many nations of the world. I am afraid that after World War II the United States got that insane notion also. We stuck our nose into the affairs of other countries when we should have kept our nose at home where it belonged. This has been the fallacy of the nations of the world, and it was the fallacy of Babylon. They were lifted up with pride and felt they were capable of ruling the world.

Notice that God mentions their sin of drunkenness. This issue comes up several times in the writings of the prophets: in Amos, Joel, Nahum, and now Habakkuk. Nahum makes it

clear that drunkenness brought down the kingdom of Assyria. Amos tells us that it was drunkenness that caused God to send the northern kingdom into captivity. Now Habakkuk says that it is drunkenness that will cause God to destroy Babylon. In other words, drunkenness works out its own destruction. Drunkenness characterized Babylon. Read [Daniel 5](#), which tells of Belshazzar's great feast. That was the night that Babylon fell. Why? They were drunk! It was a night of revelry and drunkenness. They felt perfectly safe and secure in their fortified city.

Drunkenness brought down Rome also. On our tour to Bible lands, I have taken groups of people to a place many of them had never heard of. It is Ostia, about fifteen miles from Rome, down by the Tiber River on the seacoast. The ruins at Ostia reveal that there the Romans gave themselves over to revelry and drunkenness -- those were the things that brought them there. It was the playground of the Romans.

And drunkenness will destroy our own nation. As I travel across this country, I stay in many of the hotels, motels, and inns where conventions are in progress. As I have observed them, they are times of great revelry and drinking. Recently in Dallas, Texas, there were two conventions going on at one time while we were there. On the way to the service in the evening, we would pass two big rooms where cocktail parties were in progress. Now these were the conventions of two reputable companies in this country, but that was the way they carried on their business. How long will a nation last that has millions of alcoholics?

Here in the little Book of Habakkuk, God says that drunkenness has led to pride and has made you like "hell" or sheol -- you want to gobble up everything. The Book of Proverbs puts it this way: "The horseleach hath two daughters, crying, give, give. There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, It is enough: The grave . . ." ([Prov. 30:15-16](#)). The grave is sheol, and it is first on the list. Habakkuk uses the same expression, "who enlargeth his desire as hell [sheol]" -- continuing to expand their borders, moving out, never, never satisfied.

Now God spells out the five woes upon Babylon.

Shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? and to him that ladeth himself with thick clay! [[Hab. 2:6](#)].

The first woe is a taunting proverb against Babylon because they were seizing by force that which was not theirs.

"Shall not all these take up a parable against him." The "all these" probably refers to the nations that have been victims of Babylon's aggression.

"To him that ladeth himself with thick clay!" A better translation is "and maketh himself rich with loans," which makes more sense. It is one thing to buy property and pay for it, but it is another thing to take it by force. God is pronouncing a woe against this nation for wanting more and taking that which does not belong to them.

You see, God has planned that man by the sweat of his brow is going to make his living. And, my friend, if you are not earning your living by the sweat of your brow, somebody else is doing it for you. Babylon wanted somebody else to do the work, and then they by force would take it away. That is the first woe -- God is going to judge Babylon for that, and He is just and righteous for doing it.

Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee, and awake that shall vex thee, and thou shalt be for booties unto them? [[Hab. 2:7](#)].

"And thou shalt be for booties unto them?" is the principle that whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap. God is saying, "You take it away from somebody, then somebody else will take it away from you." The fact is that when Media-Persia became a great nation, they took Babylon. By night the River Euphrates, which flowed through the city of Babylon, was cut off and the water diverted into other channels, leaving a dry riverbed through the city. And Gobryas, the Median general, marched his army along that riverbed into the city and took it by surprise.

Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil thee; because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein [[Hab. 2:8](#)].

Man is bloodthirsty, and man is covetous.

The second woe is for their covetousness and their self-aggrandizement --

Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil!

Thou hast consulted shame to thy house by cutting off many people, and hast sinned against thy soul.

For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it [[Hab. 2:9-11](#)].

Covetousness was a sin of Babylon along with drunkenness. Their covetousness was an evil kind of coveting. They wanted that which did not belong to them. God tells us we are not to covet our neighbor's property or our neighbor's wife or our neighbor's wealth.

"That he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil!" This is likening Babylon to an eagle who feels that his nest is absolutely impregnable.

"Thou hast consulted shame to thy house . . . and hast sinned against thy soul." Babylon brought the judgment of God itself by its covetousness and bloodshed. Even the stones would cry out against them. Contrast this to the time in the life of the Lord Jesus when the religious rulers tried to silence the crowd who were singing hosannas to Him. He said, ". . . I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out" ([Luke 19:40](#)).

The third woe has to do with murder and pillage, slaughter and violence --

Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity! [[Hab. 2:12](#)].

This was the method of destruction that built Babylon. They became rich by warfare.

My friend, if you stand back and look at the history of mankind, you come to the conclusion that he must be insane the way that he has lived on this earth. And, actually, he is insane -- insane with a sinful nature so that he can't even direct his path. He thinks he is right in what he does. People have never waged war without thinking they were doing the right thing. We see here God's condemnation of Babylon, but it can be stretched out and brought up to date and fitted like a glove on any modern nation you choose.

Behold, is it not of the LORD of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity? [[Hab. 2:13](#)].

This verse could be translated: "Behold, is it not of the LORD of hosts that the peoples shall labor only for fire, and the nations shall weary themselves for nothing?" Think of the futile efforts that have been made by the great nations of the past. Instead of building up, they have spent more time in tearing down. Look at Greece, for instance, and their marvelous, wonderful pieces of architecture, the statues, the art, and literature; but actually, the Greeks spent more time in destruction. If you follow the march of Alexander the Great as he crossed over into Asia, you will notice that he did nothing in the world but destroy one city after another, one great civilization after another. That was the thing that marked him out. And that is the thing that marked out Babylon, the nation about which Habakkuk is prophesying.

For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea [[Hab. 2:14](#)].

This is the far-off goal toward which God is moving. This will be fulfilled when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to the earth (see [Isa. 11:9](#)).

Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that puttest thy bottle to him, and makest him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness! [[Hab. 2:15](#)].

This is actually a little different from the drunkenness mentioned in [verse 5](#). There God says, "He transgresseth by wine." Here He says, "Woe unto him that giveth his neighbour drink, that puttest thy bottle to him, and makes him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!" The tragic thing is that liquor is something that leads to gross immorality. It leads to the breaking down of morals. It leads men to commit sins they otherwise probably would not commit -- dishonesty and many other sins.

Drunkenness is an alarming problem in many of our large corporations today. I have talked with a man here in Southern California who holds a very responsible position in a large corporation and with another man who is connected with one of the big banks in our state. They both tell me that their corporations have employed certain officials whose business it is to watch for any of their men who are beginning to drink too much. They have many ways of discerning this. They will talk to his wife and have him followed at

night if certain things begin to show in his work -- if he is late to work or perhaps doesn't even show up for work. Because some of these men are brilliant men, good men, the company officials will go to them, confront them with their drinking problem, and offer to help them to give it up. But notice how crazy this is: on one hand, these companies have cocktail parties where their men get drunk, and on the other hand, they have a process for drying them out! That is sort of like running a hospital where you bring in healthy people, give them disease germs, and then treat them for the disease they get! Man becomes sort of a guinea pig in this crazy world in which we live today. So many illogical things are being done even by large corporations.

This is the condemnation that is here brought against Babylon. God says to them, "You are making drunkards. Not only are you drinking yourselves, but you are also making drunkards of others."

Again may I refer to an authority, a man and his wife who are working with young people who are caught up in the drug culture. They tell me that many of these young people have come out of homes where cocktails are served. If Mama and Papa are going to have cocktails and live their lives, why can't Junior have his drugs? I would like to have a good answer for that because Junior has asked that question of me. I don't have an answer for him because I think Mama and Papa are responsible for his going into this drug culture. I believe that behind the problem of drugs has been drunkenness. Drunkenness is the thing that has brought this to pass in our nation today.

I know that these things are not being said today, and I know that it does not make me very popular to say them. But I don't think Habakkuk was too popular himself -- certainly not down in Babylon when this word percolated down there. But they found out that God condemns drunkenness and that God condemns making drunkards of others.

Notice that drunkenness leads to gross immorality --

Thou art filled with share for glory: drink thou also, and let thy foreskin be uncovered: the cup of the LORD'S right hand shall be turned unto thee, and shameful spewing shall be on thy glory [Hab. 2:16].

Drunkenness leads to gross immorality. It leads to divorce. It leads to the breaking up of homes. It leads to a life of sin. I have come to the place in my own life that I have lost respect for men in government. These fellows talk so big about honesty, and they talk so big and brave about helping the poor, while it is a well-known fact that many of them are actually alcoholics who drink like fish. May I ask you, how can we have respect for government when this sort of thing is all out in the open? Yet they ask us to respect them, to look up to them, and to give them our support. It makes me bow my head in shame to see what is happening in this great land of ours. My friend, Habakkuk spelled it out here years ago. God says, "The reason I will bring Babylon down is because of these sins."

For the violence of Lebanon shall cover thee, and the spoil of beasts, which made them afraid, because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and of all that dwell therein [Hab. 2:17].

Violence is another of the fruits which comes from drunkenness. You see, all kinds of immoralities spring from drunkenness. The drug culture, the gross immorality, the prevalence of divorce -- all of these sins that are abroad in our land today -- have come out of drunkenness.

The fifth woe is God's condemnation of the greatest sin of all --

What profiteth the graven image that the maker thereof hath graven it; the molten image, and a teacher of lies, that the maker of his work trusteth therein, to make dumb idols?

Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it [[Hab. 2:18-19](#)].

Actually, drunkenness is not the greatest sin. The greatest sin is idolatry, false religion, turning to an idol instead of turning to God. This is the worst sin of all.

In the Book of Judges a great principle of government is presented, a principle which is also stated very clearly in the prophecy of Isaiah. All of the subsequent prophets simply bear out and apply this principle which has already been stated. The principle is this: There are three steps in the downfall of a nation. First of all, there is religious apostasy. The second step is moral awfulness. And the third step is political anarchy. These are the three steps by which nations pass off the stage of human history. That has always been the way it has moved. You see, the primary problem never was political anarchy. The primary problem never was moral awfulness. As bad as these are, the root problem goes back to religious or spiritual apostasy, a turning away from the living and true God.

This is the thing which has happened to my nation today, and I am not the only one who is saying this, by any means. A prominent professor of history has made the statement that the American dream is vanishing in the midst of terrifying realities and visible signs of decadence in our contemporary society. Clinton Rossiter, at one time a professor of American history at Cornell University, said that in our youth we had a profound sense of national purpose that we lost over the years of our rise to glory. James Reston of the New York Times (and I don't think anybody has ever called him a conservative) has said that in public they talk about how optimistic and wonderful the future is, but that the private conversations of thoughtful men in Washington are quite different. It is his opinion that for the first time since World War II, one begins to hear of doubts that mortal man is capable of solving or even controlling the political, social, and economic problems that life has placed before him. This is the picture and this is the story of the downfall of nations, and it alarms me. This great principle, which this man Habakkuk has again restated in the Word of God, was fulfilled in the nation of Babylon.

The downfall of a nation begins in idolatry; it begins in turning away from the living and true God. We would like to think that idolatry has gone out of style, that no one today in this country is bowing down to an idol. That, of course, is not true. Many a man today is worshiping the almighty dollar. Many a man worships sex. Many a man worships pleasure. Many a woman has given her virtue in order to become a famous star or in order to be promoted. May I say to you, anything that you give yourself to, anything that takes all your time or energy, anything that takes all of you is what you worship. That,

my friend, is your god, that is your idol, and that is what God condemns. God says that He is a jealous God. God says, "I made you. I created you. I have redeemed you. And I want you." When a man turns his back on God, he is doing the worst thing any man can possibly do.

But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him [[Hab. 2:20](#)].

Personally, I believe this looks to the future when the Lord Jesus Christ will come to the earth. When He is in His temple down here, the whole earth will be silent before Him. All of the noise, all of the clamor, all of the protest, all of the confusion will disappear at that time. But it is also true that it applies to today. The reason we are having all these difficulties and problems down here is that, although He is yonder in heaven, although the Lord is in His temple, man does not bow before Him and recognize Him. It would be a wonderful thing if we could just have a week of silence. Wouldn't it be wonderful if everyone in Washington, D.C., would keep his mouth shut for a week? Wouldn't it be wonderful if all of us preachers on radio would keep our mouths shut? Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing if everyone who is doing so much talking would just keep quiet and wait before almighty God?

"The LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him." But the second psalm opens with a question mark -- Why? Just like Habakkuk's questions, the psalmist asks, "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?" ([Ps. 2:1](#)). Why all the clamor? Why all the protest? Because they are far from God. The nations have forgotten that God today is in His heaven. Browning was wrong when he said that God is in His heaven and all's right with the world. God is in His heaven, but all is wrong with the world because man is not rightly related to God. Our problem today is a problem of man's relationship to God. My friend, there is only one alternative, there is only one way out: "The just shall live by his faith" ([v. 4](#)).

Chapter 3

THEME: The pleasure of the prophet

As we come to the third chapter of Habakkuk, a tremendous change has taken place in the life of this man Habakkuk. When we get to the end of this chapter, we will see that this man has made a right about-face. The book opened in gloom -- Habakkuk has a question mark for a brain, and he has questioned God. But now it closes in glory with a great exclamation point. It closes on a high note of praise, and you will not find any more confident faith than that which is expressed in the last part of this book.

We can divide this chapter into three very definite sections. In the first two verses, we have the prayer of the prophet. We have the program of God in [verses 3-17](#), and then we have the position of the prophet in [verses 18-19](#).

Prayer Of The Prophet (3:1-2)

A prayer of Habakkuk the prophet upon Shigionoth [[Hab. 3:1](#)].

Shigionoth is a word having to do with music. Some think it might have been some sort of a musical point used to indicate to the musician the way the piece was to be played. Others think it was a musical instrument. We also find this word in the Book of Psalms (the singular form, shiggaion, is used in the title to [Psalm 7](#)). We know it has to do with music, and Habakkuk's prayer is Hebrew poetry. It is a song of high praise.

What a change has taken place in the life of Habakkuk! His glorious experience on the watchtower and his patient waiting for an answer from God have brought him into a place of real faith and have opened his eyes to something he was not conscious of before. Therefore, this chapter is his song. I would call it a folk song; it's a happy song. It is to be played with a stringed instrument, according to the last sentence of this chapter, which says, "To the chief singer on my stringed instruments" ([v. 19](#)). I suppose that this is a little notation which Habakkuk put there to indicate how this song was to be sung. Perhaps he is telling the soloist to get with it, that this was something to be sung with a stringed instrument. Aren't most of the folk songs today sung with a stringed instrument? You and I may not like these stringed instruments and what is coming from them, but nevertheless, stringed instruments are used for folk singing. Apparently, that is what we have here in this chapter, but it was on a much higher plane than the music I hear today.

I do not choose to listen to our modern music, but I often have to hear it. It is amazing that we hear so much about freedom of speech, but what about freedom of hearing? I'd like to have my ears protected today. Just because some vile person insists upon his freedom of speech, my ears are offended because I have to listen to singing that I don't care for. I am forced to hear at least a segment of a dirty song -- in my judgment, it is a dirty song -- but he's got to have his liberty. We today don't consider that we ought to have a little freedom of our ears and not have to listen to a lot of the junk that is being passed around.

O LORD, I, heard thy speech, and was afraid: O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy [[Hab. 3:2](#)].

Habakkuk's song is a wonderful song. I do not think this would be offensive to anyone's ears. It is a beautiful prayer. Habakkuk says, "O LORD, I have heard thy speech." In other words, God has answered him. God has said to him, "Now look here, Habakkuk. I want you to stay in your watchtower, and I want you to walk by faith. I want you to trust Me. You think that I am not doing anything about the sins of My people, but I am. I am preparing a nation, the Chaldeans, or the Babylonians, and they are going to be used as I used the Assyrians against the northern kingdom of Israel -- they were the 'rod of my anger.' But when I am through with the Babylonians, I am going to judge them, and I will judge them on a righteous basis." God's judgment of Babylon was spelled out in chapter 2 in the five woes, the great national sins which brought that nation down. God was moving to bring Babylon down.

The very interesting thing is that Habakkuk now reverses himself. He says, "I've heard Your speech, and I am afraid." What is he afraid of? Well, he had thought that God wasn't doing anything. Now he is afraid the Lord is doing too much!

Notice what Habakkuk says: "O LORD, revive thy work in the midst of the years, in the midst of the years make known; in wrath remember mercy." He says, "Lord, I didn't think You were working. I didn't think that You were doing anything, but I see now that You are moving in judgment. And since You are moving in judgment, remember to be merciful even to the Chaldeans, and be merciful to Your people." Before, Habakkuk had been calling down fire from heaven not only upon his own nation who had departed from God but also upon the Chaldeans. Now he is saying, "Lord, don't forget to be merciful." Well, God is merciful, and God is gracious. He is not willing that any should perish.

It does look today as if God is not doing anything, but if you and I could ascend to the watchtower of Habakkuk, if we could learn that the just shall live by his faith, if we could have a living faith in God and see what is moving behind the scenes and see the wheels that are turning, I think that we would be as surprised as this man was. I am not sure but that we, too, would cry out to God for mercy. A great many Christians today have thrown up their hands about the conditions in our own country -- they've just given up. We all feel that way at times, don't we? But, may I say to you, God is moving today in judgment, and somebody needs to cry out to Him and say, "Oh, Lord, in wrath, as You are moving in judgment, don't forget to be merciful to us. We need Your mercy." This great nation of ours needs the mercy of God today. Since World War II, we have been on an ego trip. We have really had a flight of pride, of being the greatest nation in the world, and now even our little gas buggies have been slowed down. We feel almost helpless today. What would we do in the time of a major crisis? Suppose we were attacked from the outside, how much gasoline would there be? How much of the many other chemicals that are so needed would there be? How long would we really last? It is my belief that God is moving in judgment, and we need to ask Him to be merciful to us. Shakespeare has Portia say in *The Merchant of Venice* (Act IV, Scene i):

The quality of mercy is not strain'd
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blest.

We need His mercy. We talk about showers of blessing -- what we need today are showers of mercy from almighty God.

What a reversal has taken place in the thinking of this man Habakkuk. At first he said, "You are not doing anything, Lord. Why don't You do something? Why do You let them get by with their sin?" Now God has let Habakkuk see that He is doing something, and Habakkuk cries out for the mercy of God. If we really knew how much God is moving in judgment, I am of the opinion that it would bring America to her knees before Almighty God.

Let us move on down into this very wonderful prayer. Habakkuk's prayer is actually a recital of what God has done in the past history of the people of Israel. In view of the fact that He has done it in the past, He intends to do it again in the future -- that is the thought here. You can depend upon God's continuing to do what He has done in the past. Paul wrote about this to us as believers -- in fact, this is my life verse: "Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" ([Phil. 1:6](#)). My friend, has God begun a good work in you? He has brought you up to this present moment, has He not? He has begun a good work in you, and you

can be sure He will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ, until He takes you out of this world and you will be in His likeness. This is our confidence, and this is the great confidence of this psalm of Habakkuk.

Program Of God (3:3-17)

In this section I believe there are three men in the background. However, none of them is mentioned by name, because this is not a psalm about what any man has done; it is a psalm about what God has done through men. Therefore, the men are not mentioned by name. Many scholars see only two men here. But I believe that we have Abraham ([vv. 3-6](#)), Moses ([vv. 7-10](#)), and Joshua ([vv. 11-15](#)). However, there are many who feel that Moses is the only one mentioned in [verses 3-10](#).

God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran.
Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his
praise [[Hab. 3:3](#)].

Teman is in Edom, and Paran is nearby in the Sinaitic Peninsula. Many think this is a reference to the time when the children of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt. However, you will recall that Abraham went down to Egypt even before that time.

Selah is a very interesting word which is also found in the Psalms. Its use here would indicate again that this is a psalm. There is a difference of viewpoint as to what selah means. Some believe that it marks a pause in the music, a breathing place. Some think it means that this is where the drums should come in and the music reach a high crescendo. Well, I'm not very musical -- in fact, I am not musical at all. To me, I think of it as meaning, "Stop, look, and listen." At all the railroad crossings when I was a boy a cross was put up which said, "Stop, Look, and Listen." That is what I think selah means. God is saying, "Now sit up and take notice. Be sure to hear this." The singer is to really let go and the drummer to really pound the drums at this point. Selah is to call attention to what has been said. Whether this verse speaks of Abraham or Moses is unimportant because God was present with both of these men.

We have a marvelous, wonderful picture here of the glory of God: "His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise." Well, that hasn't taken place quite yet. But certainly, as far as Abraham was concerned, there was praise in his heart. And for the children of Israel when they came out of Egypt, at first at least, there was praise in their hearts. Of course, they became complainers and whiners during the rest of the journey.

"His glory covered the heavens." We need to be impressed today as believers with the glory of our God. How majestic, how powerful, how wonderful is our God!

And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his
hand: and there was the hiding of his power [[Hab. 3:4](#)].

"And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand." These "horns" are spokes of light, rays of light. As you know, when the sun comes up, rays of light shoot up from it. This is the picture we are given of His approach. I think that when the Lord Jesus comes back to take His church out of this world, a glory will be present that was not present when He was born in Bethlehem. That will also be true when He comes to the earth to establish His Kingdom.

"And there was the hiding of his power." In other words, the glory of God so covered Him that you could not see Him. The very glory of God obscures the glory of God, if you please. Oh, the majesty of His person! This is something which believers need to recognize and respect.

Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet [[Hab. 3:5](#)].

This could apply to the time of Moses in Egypt and the ten plagues; but it also could apply to Abraham who went down to Egypt because there was a famine, a pestilence, in the land.

He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting [[Hab. 3:6](#)].

"He stood, and measured the earth." Remember that God said to Abraham, "I am going to give you this land," and He measured it out to him. God has made the statement that He has lined up the nations of the world according to the way He gave that land to Abraham. That is an amazing thing, by the way.

"He beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting." Oh, the ways of our God are past finding out! This is a marvelous psalm, my friend.

I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction: and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble [[Hab. 3:7](#)].

"I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction" -- Cushan is Ethiopia. "And the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble." You will recall that this man Moses went down into the land of Midian for a time. It is believed now by some scholars that Moses, as the son of Pharaoh's daughter, probably led a campaign into Ethiopia. That, of course, is not really a matter of record but rather the belief of some scholars. We do know that he ". . . was mighty in words and in deeds" ([Acts 7:22](#)).

Was the LORD displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of salvation? [[Hab. 3:8](#)].

This is a reference to the children of Israel crossing the Red Sea and crossing the Jordan River. God opened up the waters for them. This is highly figurative, beautiful language, by the way. It is Hebrew poetry, and it speaks of the fact that God was not angry with the rivers because they blocked the way; rather, He merely opened up the Red Sea and let the people cross over, as He did again later with the Jordan River.

Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word. Selah. Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers [[Hab. 3:9](#)].

"Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word. Selah." God was making good His covenant, His promise, to His people. Believe me,

"selah" means that you need to pound those drums again, drummer. This should wake them up and cause them to listen to what God has to say.

"Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers." Have you ever stopped to think how God has sliced this earth with rivers? The rivers are like great slices down through the earth. What a highly figurative but accurate picture is given to us here!

The mountains saw thee, and they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high [[Hab. 3:10](#)].

When Moses went up to receive the Law on top of Mount Sinai, the mountain trembled, and the children of Israel were so frightened that they actually did not want to come near it. They didn't want God to speak to them at all -- they were absolutely frightened.

These verses are a picture of how God through Moses delivered the children of Israel. First, God made a covenant with Abraham, and He made it good. Then God made a covenant with Moses that He would deliver the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt. He made that covenant good also, and He delivered them as He had said He would.

In [verse 11](#) we come to Joshua. I think it is quite clear that Joshua is in the background here but, as I said before, the names of these men are not mentioned because the emphasis is upon the acts of God.

The sun and moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of thine arrows they went, and at the shining of thy glittering spear [[Hab. 3:11](#)].

"The sun and moon stood still in their habitation" -- this immediately identifies this with Joshua.

"At the light of thine arrows they went, and at the shining of thy glittering spear." In other words, the very shining of the sun was like a glittering spear.

Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in anger [[Hab. 3:12](#)].

When God put His people in that land, He put them in there and removed the Amorites because of the sin in their lives. The Amorites who occupied the section in which Jericho was located were eaten up with venereal disease. God moved them out of that land because they would have infected the entire human family. It was almost a plague among them in those days.

Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah [[Hab. 3:13](#)].

There has been a question as to whether "then anointed" refers to Israel or to the Messiah. Personally, I think it means the Messiah here. "Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy

people, even for salvation with thine anointed" -- it is the Lord Jesus who is the Savior as well as the Anointed One, the Messiah.

"Thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah." When the "anointed one" is mentioned here, the music is to reach the highest crescendo, what is called fortissimo. Here is where you need a good soprano and a good basso. This is great praise unto God for the salvation which He wrought for these people. He delivered them out of Egypt under Moses, and He brought them into the land through Joshua, but these were all the acts of God.

Thou didst strike through with his staves the head of his villages:
they came out as a whirlwind to scatter me: their rejoicing was as
to devour the poor secretly.

Thou didst walk through the sea with thine horses, through the
heap of great waters [[Hab. 3:14-15](#)].

This was God making good His promises, and this was His salvation to them.

We come now to the reaction of the prophet to all of this. I could only wish that I could do justice to the remainder of this little book and of this chapter. I know that I am totally inadequate to present it as it should be presented to you. This is one of the great passages of the Word of God. I wish that somehow I could convey to your heart something of the grandeur and the glory that is here.

When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice:
rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself, that I
might rest in the day of trouble: when he cometh up unto the
people, he will invade them with his troops [[Hab. 3:16](#)].

At the end of this book, Habakkuk now gives us his own personal experience. He opened the book, as we have seen, with his own personal experience. He tells now about his own physical reaction to all of this. Did you ever have that sinking feeling in the pit of your tummy when some crisis faced you or you came to some place in life where there was a great emergency? This was Habakkuk's experience. He says, "When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice." Have you ever been so frightened that you could not speak audibly? I am sure that most of us have had an experience like that.

I had that kind of an experience as a young man when I was going to see a certain young lady. The girl who lived next door to her also had a young man who was keeping company with her. After this other young man and I would leave their homes in the evening, there apparently was a Peeping Tom who had found a place on the porch where he could look into both of their bedrooms at the same time. Each of these girls had a sister, so that there were two girls in each home. Apparently, he had been doing this for some time. One evening, the girls next door thought they saw him pass by their window, and so they called to the home where I was. Very foolishly, the girl brought me her father's pistol, and I walked to the alley in the back where there was a high fence. I was walking back to the house, getting ready to tell the girls there wasn't anybody back there. All of a sudden, a form appeared right above me on that fence. That fellow could have jumped down upon me, but he was so frightened at seeing me that he didn't budge -- and neither did I! I tried to raise the gun to shoot, and I thank God I was so frightened that I

was not able to do it. I tried to talk, but I couldn't say anything. The girl called her father and said, "He's choking Vernon out there!" He wasn't choking me -- I was so scared I just couldn't open my mouth. Instead of being a hero like I intended to be that evening, I turned out to be a very sorry one. That fellow, whoever he was, dropped down on the other side of the fence and started running. I set the gun on the fence because I couldn't hold it steady, and I shot at him twice, but he was perfectly safe. I don't think my shots got in his neighborhood at all! I remember that experience as a time when I felt what Habakkuk describes, but mine was only a chance encounter.

Habakkuk says, "Rottenness entered into my bones." That means he couldn't stand up -- he had to hold on to something. "And I trembled in myself, that I might rest in the day of trouble." He saw that God was going to move in judgment, and he knew that it was going to be a hard and difficult time.

Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls [[Hab. 3:17](#)].

Habakkuk says, "There will be no fruit on the trees, there will be no grapes, the livestock will be gone." All of this will be a part of the judgment of God.

Position Of The Prophet (3:18-19)

In spite of the impending judgment, Habakkuk is able to say --

Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments [[Hab. 3:18-19](#)].

I want you to understand that God is our strength and our joy. God has not promised peace and prosperity in these days in which we live. So much is being promised to us today! I just threw into the wastebasket a magazine which comes from a so-called Christian organization and which told about all the things that you can get through prayer. The magazine promised that God will make you prosperous, that He will give you health, and that He will give you everything. My friend, God is not a glorified Santa Claus! But our God is moving in a very definite way. If you want an answer to your problems, Habakkuk gives you the answer here. That answer is simply this: God is the answer to your problems.

In the beginning of this book, Habakkuk came to God and said, "Why are You doing these things? Why are You permitting me to see evil? Why don't You move?" God brought Habakkuk to the watchtower and let him see what He was doing, and now Habakkuk says, "I am going to walk by faith with God." My friend, God is the answer to your problem today. I don't know who you are or what your problem is, but God is the answer. You can have faith and confidence in Him. God has a purpose in your life, and He intends to carry it through. You can trust Christ, and, when you trust Him, you will find that He begins to work in you. He wants to conform you to His image -- it is God's intention to make you like Christ.

The apostle Paul writes: "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" ([Rom. 8:28-29](#)). Regardless of the big words Paul uses, he simply means that God's eternal purpose with you is to make you like Jesus Christ. Again, he writes in 2 Corinthians: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" ([2Cor. 3:18](#)). My friend, God has a purpose for you. It does not matter who you are. To say that someone else has a greater purpose in life than you have is entirely wrong. You are as important in God's plan and purpose as any individual who has ever lived on this earth or who ever will live on this earth. He wants to make you like Christ. We read in [1Corinthians 15:47-49](#): "The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." We are down here in these human bodies which have actually been taken out of the dirt; and God has made us human beings, but that is not His final purpose. We are earthy, but He wants us to be heavenly, and that is His goal for us.

Imagine that you live in the day of Michelangelo. One day you visit his studio, and you see there a rough piece of stone, which is dirty and polluted because it has come out of a dark and damp quarry. It is a hard piece of marble -- crude, unyielding, cold, unlovely, and unsightly. But you come back in six months, and what has happened? Why, it has become a statue of David or of the archangel Michael. May I say to you, just as Michelangelo had a purpose for that crude piece of marble, God has a purpose for you and me today. We are earthy, but He has a heavenly purpose for us. You see, the ideal of the artist (who is the Holy Spirit) is to conform us to the image of Christ. The chisel He uses is the discipline of the Lord -- "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth . . ." ([Heb. 12:6](#)). And the hammer is the Word of God. And therefore we can say with the psalmist, ". . . I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" ([Ps. 17:15](#)).

My friend, God is the answer to your questions. God is the answer to your problems. Therefore, it does not matter who you are or where you are; you can rejoice in Him, and you can rejoice in His salvation. You can say with Habakkuk, who was such a pessimist in the beginning, "I will joy in the God of my salvation." This book opened in gloom, but it closes in glory. It opened with a question mark, but it closes with a mighty exclamation point. And it ends with his wonderful song. May you and I be encouraged today by the Word of God!

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(Recommended for Further Study)

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